



## Program Description

Neighborhood business districts are the places where small businesses thrive, communities engage, and jobs are created. Successful small businesses are the key to creating and preserving vibrant, safe, sustainable districts and businesses are most successful when they are located in neighborhoods with an active street life and healthy sense of community.

The *Only in Seattle* Initiative empowers neighborhood business districts to organize around a common vision and attract investment. This initiative provides district leaders with funding and support to harness their collective strengths, decide on joint action and make changes to improve their districts.

This initiative is based on proven methodologies for creating vibrant business districts. A set of core building blocks are the critical components of any successful district. Business districts benefit most from comprehensive approaches that work simultaneously to build the following (5) strategy areas:

1. **Organization:** Neighborhood organizations, residents, property owners and business owners collaborate and work together toward a common vision for the business district.
2. **Marketing & Promotion:** District has a positive, consistent image that helps draw more customers to visit
3. **Business & Retail Development:** Businesses prosper because they are collaborative, supported by the community and receive assistance to strengthen and grow. New businesses open in the district that complement and improve the business mix.
4. **Appearance & Pedestrian Environment:** Retail and pedestrian environments are attractive, inviting and easily accessible. Catalyst real estate projects rehabilitate or replace underutilized spaces, generating a sense of forward momentum and improvement.
5. **Clean & Safe:** The district is clean and customers feel safe and welcome.

*Note:* See *STRATEGY AREAS* for detailed description of the types of activities that fit into these strategy areas.

## **PROGRAM STRUCTURE**

This initiative provides seed funding and support that can help a business district move ahead of its current state to a new level of organization and operations. Participating districts develop a strategic vision of where they want to be, an action plan to achieve that vision and clear outcomes that are intended from the work. The action plan should be developed and implemented with strong community stakeholder participation, coordinated and led by a lead agency. The action plan should be focused on making an impact in the business district and building a foundation for long-term sustainability. Neighborhoods will receive technical assistance and support from local and national experts and OED staff assistance to develop and implement these plans.

**Action Plans** – The cornerstone of the initiative is the development of an action plan, which contains the vision, key revitalization activities and the outcomes to be completed within up to a three-year period. Some business districts may have these plans and want to focus on their implementation while others may want to develop a plan for their districts.

**Lead Agency** – There must be one organization identified as the lead for managing the implementation of the action plan.

**Strong Community Stakeholder Participation** – While the activities are led by a local lead organization, no one agency can do everything. Public agencies, nonprofit organizations, area residents, businesses and property owners must share investments in and responsibility for strengthening their neighborhoods. Action Plans must be developed with the input and involvement of key stakeholders and each component of the plan must identify the organizations, staff or volunteers identified to take responsibility for ensuring implementation.

**Impact and Long Term Sustainability** - The Action Plans should be focused on making an immediate impact in the district and developing infrastructure that will allow the work to be sustainable over time.

**Investment** - OED will make an investment of grant dollars, technical assistance and training resources and staff time in each participating business district. The grant funding can reimburse operating and direct costs incurred by the lead agencies and other agencies submitting joint proposals. This can include staff costs, supplies, marketing, etc. Funding can also be used for physical improvement projects such as façade improvements and business district beautification.

## ***SERVICES AVAILABLE TO PARTICIPANTS***

**Technical Assistance and Support:** As a participant in this program, business districts will be involved in coordinated peer-to-peer learning opportunities on topics relevant to the challenges they face in their work. There is also limited funding to bring in specific expertise when needed, such as retail study or marketing assistance.

**Business Improvement Area Formation and Support:** Business Improvement Areas (BIAs) are assessment districts created to provide an ongoing annual budget that can be used for implementing many of the revitalization activities described in Section I. BIA assessments are collected by the city, held in a dedicated account, and used to reimburse the cost of BIA activities. Each BIA has a governing board made up of rate payers in the district who make local decisions about how their assessments will be used. Business districts interested in learning about creating a BIA or revising an existing BIA, can work with experienced city staff and consultants to explore these possibilities.

**Business Advocacy and Farmers Market Support:** The Business Services Team at OED will guide businesses through the city bureaucracy and provide unmatched customer service. When your district or a business is having a city-related issue and does not know where to turn, this team can help to resolve it.

**Organizational Capacity Building and Creation of a District Vision:** OED will provide facilitated trainings for selected business district stakeholder groups on strategies for successful board development and how to maintain strong community-based partnerships. The trainings will lead to the creation of an actionable vision for their district as the basis for a business-oriented work plan. Trainings would be held over a 2-3 month period in both individual and group settings.

**Staff Liaison Support:** Business Districts will have staff liaisons at OED who will be assigned to problem solve and bring in expertise as needed.

## PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

**Target Area:** Business districts will have clearly defined geographic boundaries that will be the focus of the work.

**Action Plan:** Each district must be developing or have a detailed plan related to their proposal describing the vision, goals, strategies and actions to accomplish the vision. This Action Plan must be submitted with the proposal for funding or, if the plan has not been developed yet, the proposal can request funding to create it. These Action Plans will be evaluated based on the criteria listed in Section IV below.

**Lead Agency:** Each district's Action Plan must be coordinated by a lead agency that is located in or has significant ties to the neighborhood business district it will be working in. The lead agency must have nonprofit status, or must have a fiscal sponsor that is a nonprofit organization. The fiscal sponsor or lead organization must have basic infrastructure in place, including a financial accounting system, and general commercial liability insurance with limits that fulfill city contracting requirements. Depending on the funding received, the fiscal sponsor or lead agency might be required to have an annual audit performed by a Certified Public Accountant.

**One Proposal per Business District:** Efforts in the district should be coordinated among community stakeholders. Therefore, we will only accept one application from each commercial district. Multiple applications from different potential lead agencies will not be accepted. The application can include funding for multiple agencies; the lead agency will be responsible for managing the overall contract and will be responsible for managing sub-contracts to other organizations utilizing funding from this program.

**Funding Requirements:** Funding for this program is primarily federal – Community Development Block Grant (CDBG). There is also City General Funds. Business districts receiving federal funds will need to be located in primarily residential (as opposed to primarily industrial) areas with over 51% of low-moderate income residents served by the district. Business districts that do not meet this requirement can still be eligible to receive City General Funds.

**Neighborhoods Qualifying for Federal Funds:** Business districts within the following neighborhoods would potentially qualify for the federal funding: Central Area, Rainier Valley, Chinatown International District and Little Saigon, Capitol Hill, White Center, South Park, Pioneer Square, Delridge, University District and Lake City. Federal funding eligibility will need to be determined for each proposal.

## CRITERIA FOR EVALUATING PROPOSALS

The Initiative will prioritize business districts serving low-income neighborhoods. The level and duration of funding commitments will be based on the quality of the proposals as determined by the following criteria:

- Is there a unified vision for the district that helps to drive strategies and actions for revitalization?
- Is the need and potential impact demonstrated?
- Have business district stakeholders been successfully engaged?
- Is there a lead agency with the ability to successfully implement the initiative?
- Will the effort be sustainable after public funds are expended?

## INVESTMENT TIERS

*Please note that meeting the following criteria within each tier does not guarantee the maximum grant amount. Applicants will be evaluated against the criteria and competing applications.*

### **Tier I: Grant for a “Transforming” District – up to \$200,000 per business district**

Grants intended for districts that have developed a shared vision among all primary stakeholders in the district and have created a multi-year, comprehensive action plan to fulfill the vision. The grants are given to a lead agency that serves as the central hub for the vision and action plan and coordinates implementation and communication with and between all participating parties.

In order to qualify for a Tier I grant the district must:

- ✓ Demonstrate that **three to five** of the strategy areas - with a significant level of effort and activities in planning or implementation – are in progress, and
- ✓ Have at least **one lead person** who is overseeing and managing the implementation of a comprehensive revitalization strategy for the district. The person should be paid staff, and they must spend a significant amount of time to leading the revitalization strategy.
- ✓ Demonstrate how the work will lead to a **desired level of sustainability**. This can include establishment or expansion of a Business Improvement Area (BIA).
- ✓ Have a plan that includes both staffing costs and project implementation costs. The funding request does not have to include both, but the entire Action Plan should demonstrate a combination of funding staffing and projects.

### **Tier II: Grant for an “Organizing” or an “Established” District – up to \$50,000 per business district**

Tier II grants are intended for districts that are ‘organizing’ a vision and/or action plan through stakeholder engagement, or are implementing a smaller scale action plan OR are for ‘established’ districts who, with a focused grant, can enhance or further establish existing projects or programs.

In order to qualify for Tier II, the district must:

- ✓ For **Established**: ongoing implementation of **3 - 5** of the strategy areas.
- OR**
- ✓ For **Organizing**: working on creating a comprehensive commercial district revitalization plan.
- ✓ Have at least **one lead person**. The person can be paid staff or volunteer, and they must spend a significant amount of time to leading the revitalization strategy.
- ✓ Demonstrate how the work will lead to a **desired level of sustainability**. This can include establishment or expansion of a Business Improvement Area (BIA).

### **Tier III: Grant for Façade Improvements**

Seattle Investment Fund LLC (“LLC”) is a limited liability company established by the City of Seattle to participate in the New Markets Tax Credits (“NMTC”) program. The NMTC program purpose is to assist the economic development of economically distressed neighborhoods. The LLC is working with the City of Seattle Office of Economic Development (“OED”) to invest in neighborhood facade improvement projects for design and construction costs to make significant improvements to a building façade along a major commercial corridor in the district.

In order to qualify for a Tier III grant, the following criteria will be considered:

- ✓ Project improves the physical appearance of a business district, including but not limited to façade renovations, improved signage, awning replacement and painting
- ✓ Predominant benefit of improvements accrues to small business owners
- ✓ Improvements occur in business districts serving low and moderate income residents
- ✓ Improvements are concentrated in a small geographic area to maximize cumulative impact
- ✓ Project management capacity is available to reduce administrative costs and ensure compliance with associated rules and regulations

### **Tier IV: Consultation for Organizational Capacity Building and District Vision Creation**

Tier IV is intended for neighborhoods who are seeking assistance in organizing stakeholders and facilitating a process to create a vision and/or action plan for revitalization.

In order to qualify for Tier IV, the district must:

- ✓ Have a group of stakeholders who represent the primary business interests in the district and who are willing to engage in training and visioning sessions to build a stronger business organization and develop a district vision.

### **Tier V: Consultation for BIA Creation, Modification or Basics of BIA**

Tier V is intended for commercial districts that are seeking assistance in forming a Business Improvement Area (BIA), modifying an existing BIA’s boundaries or rate payment structure, or want to educate stakeholders on the benefits of a BIA.

In order to qualify for this service, the district must:

- ✓ Be interested in OED BIA formation support

### **Tier VI: Consultation to Enhance Cultural Place Making**

OED and the Office of Arts and Cultural Affairs (ARTS) are offering technical assistance and potentially coordinated funding processes to business districts that have an existing or potentially strong connection to arts and culture as part of the identity of their district. The intention of “Cultural Place-Making” is to grow and emphasize how art and culture define and elevate a community, particularly within business districts. The goal of this partnership is to support or

facilitate a connection between artists/arts organizations/cultural organizations and business districts to develop a common vision and plan for enhancing art and culture as a significant identity/component of the neighborhood.

Business districts applying for Tier VI will receive the following technical assistance:

For all interested districts: ARTS staff will meet with districts to discuss current strategies and describe or connect them to funding opportunities to support these strategies.

For districts identified with strong potential to benefit from support –ARTS staff will organize and facilitate a meeting between the business district and artists and arts and cultural organizations working within the district, to develop or formalize a common vision and identify opportunities for collaboration and funding. This could also lead to support and preference in upcoming ARTS and OIS funding rounds.

### **Tier VII: City Infrastructure Improvements**

The City of Seattle through the Seattle Department of Transportation has available a pool of \$500,000 for capital improvement projects that enhance business districts. Neighborhood business districts that have paid on-street parking are eligible to submit proposals. Tier VII projects include design, cost estimating and construction of infrastructure and amenities in parks and in the public right of way.

In order to qualify for Tier VII districts must:

- ✓ Have paid on-street parking :  
<http://www.seattle.gov/transportation/parking/paidparkingrates.htm>
- ✓ Coordinate proposals under one lead agency that has significant ties to the business district
- ✓ Have a comprehensive action plan such as those developed for the *Only in Seattle* Program and demonstrate how the project enhances, supports and/or leverages business district revitalization efforts. *Priority will be given to those districts that are applying or have participated in the program.*
- ✓ Submit only **one** proposal per business district
- ✓ Demonstrate a strong community involvement process



## DESCRIPTION OF STRATEGY AREAS

Commercial district revitalization includes analyzing business districts' physical, economic and social needs, assessing strengths and challenges, setting forth concrete results and measuring outcomes. The goal is to build the necessary foundation and infrastructure so that the neighborhood will be able to continue to implement and sustain positive changes.

Neighborhoods can engage in a number of common activities employed by organizations across the country to create positive change. When several activities are concentrated in a focused geographic area, they can leverage and reinforce one another to create more significant impact. The following six categories of activities are described by nationally recognized commercial district revitalization experts such as National Main Street, LISC and the International Economic Development Council as the primary areas of focus. These are examples of the types of activities that are eligible for this award but this is not an all-inclusive list of potential activities that could be employed.

### 1. BUSINESS ORGANIZATION DEVELOPMENT

Creating and maintaining organizational capacity can include recruitment of volunteers, developing community leadership, facilitating organizational partnerships and forming and sustaining business district improvement programs. Supporting the organization or organizations that are leading and implementing neighborhood revitalization is critical to the success of neighborhood change. Ensuring their capacity to fund and sustain activities is an important part of reaching revitalization goals.

### 2. MARKETING & PROMOTION

- *Neighborhood Promotion*, work develops and implements promotional strategy for the district, including developing a district identity/brand, collective advertising opportunities, generating positive media coverage, creating a website, walking guide and other collateral materials. Promotion is important in contributing to and managing a new positive image for the district.
- *Community Events*, programs plan and prepare for events to promote the corridor and raise funds for the revitalization program. Events can range from a large street festival or block party to smaller events, such as grand openings or "taste of" restaurant promotions. Events provide an opportunity to highlight positive changes in the neighborhood, allow the community to gather and celebrate, bring new people to the district and can further brand it as a destination. Well organized events can help to change overall perceptions of the area.

### 3. BUSINESS & RETAIL DEVELOPMENT

- *Business Support and Retention*. Existing merchants create a district's character and identity and provide important goods and services to residents. Work to support and strengthen these businesses to help them stay and thrive in the neighborhood can lead to expansion of available goods and services as well as job growth. Many programs help merchants find technical business assistance such as marketing, accounting or merchandising support, and/or assist in finding loans for stabilization or expansion.



- *Retail and Market Study* provides the necessary data and analysis to define the trade area of the district and learn about demographic and spending power of the neighborhood. These tools will help existing business better market their services or meet existing demand, and provide the foundation for strategies to attract new businesses.
- *Business Attraction*, activities promote their district to realtors, brokers or business owners with brochures or other materials. Some identify specific retailers that could contribute most to the district and reach out to them. Other revitalization programs act like a commercial broker and market specific vacant properties.

## APPEARANCE & PEDESTRIAN ENVIRONMENT

- *Design Guidelines and Principals*, draw attention to the existing character of architecture and design, and highlight the qualities the neighborhood values most for new development. They help to ensure that new development, signage and facades contribute to a consistent sense of character and provide elements that unify the streetscape and built environment.
- *Streetscape Improvements*, include a focus on the condition of streets and sidewalks, including repaving streets, rebuilding sidewalks, installing street furniture, trash cans and way finding.
- *Storefront Improvements*, include grants and/or low-interest loans to merchants and property owners to invest in façade improvement projects including new signs, paint, awnings, etc. A large number of these relatively small changes can add up to a whole new look for the entire district.
- *Transportation and Parking Improvements* include improving public transit, pedestrian and/or bicycle access to the neighborhood and managing on-street or shared parking lots.
- *Signage and way finding* including banners, historic place information, parking location signs etc.
- *Real estate development*. Many urban districts have abandoned buildings, vacant lots or underdeveloped parcels in key locations. Redevelopment of these properties creates an opportunity to bring new residents and retailers and contributes to a sense that the neighborhood is revitalizing.

## 4. CLEAN & SAFE

- *Crime Prevention and Security*, programs often work with police departments to organize merchants and residents to report crimes, address physical conditions that could reduce crime and make the retail environment feel safe for shoppers and residents.
- *Clean Activities*, range from managing neighborhood cleanup days to hiring regular cleaning crews for garbage pick-up and sidewalk and street cleaning. A clean business district not only creates an inviting shopping environment, it also influences perceptions of safety and demonstrates an investment in the district's surroundings.